

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 KABUL 04652 01 OF 02 100920Z
ACTION NEA-11

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FM AMEMBASSY KABUL
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8453

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 KABUL 4652

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y T E X T

DEPT PLEASE PASS ALSO TO PEACE CORPS AND AID; AID FOR NE

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: EAID, AF, US
SUBJECT: U.S. ASSISTANCE TO AFGHANISTAN: MEETING WITH MINISTER
OF EDUCATION, DASTAGIR PANJSHIRI

SUMMARY: I MADE MY INITIAL CALL ON THE NEW MINISTER OF
EDUCATION PANJSHIRI ON JUNE 6. HE DISCUSSED THE PROBLEMS
FACING HIS MINISTRY AND SOME OF THE STEPS HE HAD TAKEN TO
ADDRESS THEM. HE WAS POSITIVE WITH REGARD TO AID ASSISTANCE
TO PRIMARY EDUCATION AND SAID HE WOULD BE IN TOUCH WITH US
SHORTLY FOR MORE DETAILED DISCUSSIONS. END SUMMARY.

1. ON JUNE 6, ACCOMPANIED BY THE AID AND PECE CORPS DIRECTORS,
I MADE MY INITAL CALL ON THE NEW MINISTER OF EDUCATION,
DASTAGIR PANJSHIRI. WITH THE MINISTER WERE THE PRESIDENT OF
PRIMARY EDUCATION, MOHAMMAD JAN SAFI, AND THE DIRECTOR GENERAL
OF FOREIGN RELATIONS, HAYATULLAH NASSER.

2. FROM THE OUTSET, THE MINISTER CREATTED A POSITIVE ATMOSPHERE.
HE WAS FRIENDLY AND ENERGETIC , AND GAVE THE ASPPEARANCE OF BEING
VERY OPEN AND SPONTANEOUS. AFTER EXCHANGING GREETINGS IN FARSI,
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PAGE 02 KABUL 04652 01 OF 02 100920Z

THE MINISTER SHIFTED INTO ENGLISH FOR A SHORT TIME, RECALLING
WITH GREAT AFFECTION THE AMERICAN TEACHER FROM WHOM HE LEARNED
ENGLISH. HE SAID SHE WAS PROBABLY THE FIRST WOMAN TO TEACH AT
AN ALL-MALE AFGHAN TEACHER TRAINING INSTITUTE. WHILE HE SAID HIS
ENGLISH HAD GROWN RUSTY, HE FELT IT HAD NOTABLY IMPROVED
SINCE THE REVOLUTION AS A RESULT OF HIS MANY MEETINGS WITH
INTERNATIONAL OFFICIALS. THE MINISTER ALSO RECALLED THAT MANY

PRESENT DRA OFFICIALS WERE COLLEAGUES OF HIS FROM HIS TEACHER TRAINING DAYS -- THAT INDEED SOME ASSOCIATES HAVE CALLED THE RECENT REVOLUTION THE "TEACHERS' REVOLUTION". HE THEN DWELLED FOR SOME TIME ON THE IMPORTANCE OF THE REVOLUTION FOR THE MASSES OF THE AFGHAN POPULATION, AND WENT ON TO EXTOL THE U.S. AND ITS PEOPLE AS CHAMPIONS OF DEMOCRACY AND FREEDOM. HE SAID THE U.S. "LED THE WAY" IN IMPROVING THE LIFE OF ITS WORKING PEOPLE.

3. WHEN I ASKED THE MINISTER WHAT WERE THE PROBLEMS FACING HIS MINISTRY, AND WHAT DID HE INTEND TO DO ABOUT THEM, HE APPEARED WELL PREPARED. HE SEPENT APPROXIMATELY THE NEXT HALF-HOUR ELABORATING ON THEM. HE STARTED BY DESCRIBING THE VERY SMALL NUMBER OF STUDENTS HAVING ACCESS TO EVEN A BASIC EDUCATION, AND THE INEFFICIENCY OF THE SYSTEM. HE STRESSED THE FUNDAMENTAL INJUSTICE OF EXISTING EXAMINATIONS, WHICH DISCRIMINATED AGAINST THE MEASES, PARTICULARLY THE EIGHTH GRADE EXAMINATION FOR ADVANCING TO SECONDARY EDUCATION. HE ALSO HIGHLIGHTED THE PROBLEM CREATED BY THE LARGE NUMBER OF UNEMPLOYED TWELFTH GRADE STUDENTS. HE NOTED THE FUNDAMENTAL INEQUITIES OF THE PRESENT EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM PARTICULARLY AS THEY AFFECT AFGHAN WOMEN. HE WENT ON TO DESCRIBE THE PROBLEM OF ADULT LITERACY-- WHICH WAS A GROWING PROBLEM BECAUSE OF THE LIMITED COVERAGE OF THE BASIC EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM AND, MORE FUNDAMENTALLY, BECAUSE OF THE RAPIDLY GORWING POPULATION. FYI - THIS IS THE FIRST MINISTER WHO SHOWED ANY SENSITIVITY TO POPULATION GROWTH AS A DEVELOPMENTAL PROBLEM. END FYI. HE STATED THAT THE NEW
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CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 KABUL 04652 01 OF 02 100920Z

GOVERNMENT HAD ALREADY TAKEN A NUMBER OF STEPS TO ADDRESS SOME OF THESE PROBLEMS. HE NOTED THE ELIMINATION OF THE EIGHTH GRADE EXAMINATION REQUIREMENTS FOR ADVANCEMENT TO SECONDARY SCHOOL, AND SUPPORTING STEPS WHICH HAD BEEN TAKEN TO TRAIN EIGHTH GRADE DROP-OUTS -- VOLUNTARY DONATIONS FROM ALL SOURCES HAD BEEN RECEIVED, UNEMPLOYED TEACHERS WERE VOLUNTEERING THEIR SERVICES, SELECTIVE TWELFTH GRADE GRADUATES WERE BEING USED FOR TEACHING, UNUTILIZED BUILDINGS WERE BEING TURNED INTO SCHOOLS, ETC. HE ALSO NOTED THAT NEW "REVOLUTIONARY SCHOOLS" ORIENTED TOWARDS AGRICULTURE AND THE TRADES WERE BEING ESTABLISHED AND WOULD EVENTUALLY BE CREATED THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY.

4. WHEN THE MINISTER CONCLUDED, I POINTED OUT THAT OUR AID LEGISLATION REQUIRES THAT OUR ASSISTANCE BE DIRECTED TO IMPROVING THE WELL BEING OF THE POOR, RURAL MAJORITY OF THE POPULATION, AND THUS APPEARS RELEVANT TO MANY OF HIS PRIORITY CONCERNS. I ALSO EMPHASIZED THAT WHILE OUR AID DID CONTAIN TECHNICAL CONDITIONS TO ASSURE PROJECT EFFECTIVENESS, THE UNITED STATES HAD NEVER IN THE PAST IMPOSED ANY POLITICAL CONDITIONS,

AND HAD NO INTENTION OF DOING SO IN THE FUTURE.

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PAGE 01 KABUL 04652 02 OF 02 090018Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 KABUL 4652

5. THE AID DIRECTOR THEN EXPLAINED THE STATUS OF DISCUSSIONS ON AID PROJECTS WITH THE MINISTRY PRIOR TO THE REVOLUTION. HE SAID THAT AID'S CENTRAL INTEREST HAD BEEN TO HELP EXPAND ACCESS OF THE POPULATION TO A BASIC, RELEVANT EDUCATION. HE NOTED THAT WE HAD BEEN EXPLORING WAYS TO DO THIS WITH THE PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT THROUGH ASSISTANCE TO TEACHER TRAINING AND PRIMARY SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION. HE GAVE THE MINISTER A PAPER BRIEFLY EXPLORING THE STATUS OF EACH PROJECT AND OUTSTANDING ISSUES. THE MINISTER PAID RAPT ATTENTION THROUGHOUT THE AID DIRECTOR'S PRESENTATION-- WAIVING ASIDE THE INTERPRETER AND LISTENING DIRECTLY IN ENGLISH. WHEN THE DIRECTOR HAD CONCLUDED, THE MINISTER SAID HE HAD CLEARLY UNDERSTOOD THE ISSUES AND WANTED DISCUSSIONS TO MOVE AHEAD. HE SAID HE WOULD STUDY THE PAPERS WE HAD GIVEN HIM AND GET BACK TO US SHORTLY.

6. THE PEACE CORPS DIRECTOR THEN BRIEFLY REVIEWED THE STATUS OF CURRENT VOLUNTEER PROJECTS WITH THE MINISTRY, THE PENDING REQUESTS FOR NEW VOLUNTEERS, THE PROPOSAL FOR FUTURE IN-SERVICE TEACHER TRAINING SEMINARS IN PROVINCIAL CENTERS, AND ADDED THAT THE PEACE CORPS WAS ALSO READY TO EXPLORE OTHER AREAS OF POTENTIAL COLLABORATION WHICH MIGHT BE OF INTEREST TO THE MINISTER. HE FURTHER NOTED THAT PEACE CORPS VOLUNTEERS COULD BE PARTICULARLY USEFUL WHEN APPROPRIATELY INTEGRATED IN CERTAIN AID PROJECTS. RECEIVING A WRITTEN SUMMARY OF THESE POINTS, THE MINISTER RESPONDED THAT HE WOULD WISH TO STUDY THESE MATTERS

CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 02 KABUL 04652 02 OF 02 090018Z

AND WOULD THEN GET BACK TO US.

7. AFTER MORE THAN AN HOUR WITH THE MINISTER, WE TOOK OUR
LEAVE.

8. COMMENT: THE MINISTER APPEARED TO BE A MAN OF VERY
HUMBLE ORIGINS WHO WAS INTELLIGENT AND DEDICATED TO HIS
PROFESSION. HE WAS WARM AND FRIENDLY THROUGHOUT THE MEETING.
HE CLEARLY RELISHED HIS WORK AND APPROACHED IT WITH ENTHUSIASM
AND DRIVE. UNLIKE MANY OF THE OTHER MINISTERS WE HAD MET
SO FAR, HE APPEARED KNOWLEDGEABLE ABOUT THE PROBLEMS FACING
HIM AND DECISIVE IN MOVING AHEAD TO ADDRESS THEM. HE APPEARED
KEENLY INTERESTED IN THE AID PROGRAMS DISCUSSED. THOUGH NON-
COMMITAL, HE DID EXPRESS INTEREST IN CONTINUING WITH PEACE
CORPS PROGRAMS. END COMMENT.
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